

## TEÐUDU ZA: A Music and Ritual of the Northern Ewe of Ghana

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**Abstract :** *The belief in music and ritual as two cultural components that satisfy specific needs and purposes in African societies cannot be underrated especially when one examines the social, political, economic and religious activities of the people. Indigenous religious inclinations of Africans have shaped them to perceive festivals as embodiments of music and rituals that are publicly performed to mark important landmarks in their lives. A harvest festival that fosters a close bond between the chiefs and people of northern Eweland in the Volta Region of Ghana and their objects of worship is tequdu za (yam festival celebration) This paper examines the historical and geographical backgrounds of northern Ewes, their tequdu za and finally explains why music and ritual performances in this harvest festival are strongly perceived as imperative to ensuring unity, solidarity and a total well-being of the people.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous religion, music, northern Ewes, ritual, *tequdu za*.

### I. Introduction

The sustenance of festival celebrations to date among Africans is quite dependent on strong and deeply rooted religious beliefs of a people. As an inherited cultural legacy that provides solutions to their daily problems, Africans for this reason, see no reason or need to ever abandon festival celebrations because they attribute the day to day administration of the state partly to the presence, guidance and blessings of the spirits of the deities and ancestors. A non-celebration of festivals, therefore, is believed to trigger the wrath and punishment from the spirits of the gods.

A common but important traditional music and ritual that northern Ewes consider very religious and thus, accord it a communal patronisation is the *tequdu za*. Like their neighbours of other indigenous Ghanaian or African societies, Modupe (1998:150) further explains the significance of indigenous African festival celebrations that “they illustrate among other things historical events, harvesting of crops and appeasement to various gods for protection against enemies, evil forces or epidemic diseases”. In an attempt to access a stronger and formidable fellowship that can be renewed or adjusted, northern Ewes see music and dance performance as a component of a successful ritual in festivals to the gods for physical and spiritual protection. Parrinder (1949:41), for this reason, opines:

No one who has visited a scene of public worship in Africa can be in doubt that one of the attributes of the gods is that they are music-loving gods. The most common situation in which they manifest themselves is the musical situation in which music which affects them is performed. They descend to the people through their human media and participate in the drama of worship.

Corroborating the point above, Mbiti (1991:141), states that there are many occasions when festivals add to the grandeur of both personal and communal rituals; among these festival types are planting, harvesting, hunting and fishing festivals. Dzide (2000:99) examines the festivals of Eweland and states: “there is no northern Ewe town or village that does not celebrate at least one annual festival. Apart from the celebration of festival types like the *glibagba za* (wall-breaking festival) *sasadu za* and *danyibakaka za* (migration commemoration festivals), the commonest and perhaps the most important of all the festivals celebrated by northern Ewes is the *tequdu za*.

Mamattah (1976:65) examines the historical background of Ewes and states that from Southern Nigeria, they migrated first to Ketu or Oyo in Nigeria and later moved to Dahomey (Benin Republic) before finally settling at Dotsie in the Republic of Togo. Historically, Northern Ewes were part of a major bloc of Ewes believed to have migrated from Dotsie (sometimes spelt Nuatja, Nuatia or Nouatche), a settlement area that lies about  $6^{\circ} 30' N$  and  $15^{\circ} E$  on the Lome-Atakpame road and about 112km from Lome, the capital of Togo (Daketsey, 1979:1). On the migration of Northern Ewes, Amenumey (1997) states that “by the end of the

17<sup>th</sup> century, the people left *Dotsie*, their ancestral home, in small kin groups such as families and clans and travelled in different directions towards the Volta River and camped temporarily at a number of places before finally settling at present in relatively peaceful and small autonomous communities or homelands”.

A close look at northern Ewe languages shows that beside Ewe being the main language of communication, a closer look at the language patterns of the area shows variations that exist in the *FIA FIA GBE* (non-Ewe speaking) areas which are occupied by pockets of Guan, Buem and Akan speaking ethnic groups which are referred to in Ewe as *FIA Fiala Wo*. These *fiafialawo* have their own languages but in most cases, speak Ewe as a second language. Some Guan-speaking settlements include Akpafu, Avatime, Bowiri, Likpe, Logba, Lolobi, Nkonya, Nyangbo, Santrokofoi and Tafi. The Buem speaking groups are located at Jasikan and its adjoining settlements like Baglo, Teteaman, Kute, and Okadjakrom. Going further north, one can find pockets of Akan speaking groups of settlers at Ahamansu, Apesokubi, Breweniase, Dapaa, Kadjebi, Papase, Pampawie, and Worawora.

Commenting on the geographical location of the people, Agbodeka (2000:1-4) delineates northern Eweland as bounded to the east by the Republic of Togo, to the West by the Volta Lake, to the north by Jasikan and Krachi Districts and to the south by Aŋlo, North and South Tonju, Akatsi, Aveno and Ketu Districts. Northern Eweland as a substantial part of Volta Region has a total area of 20,344 kilometres. Out of the region’s total land size, the people are currently located in seven administrative districts: Ho, Agortime-Ziofe Adaklu, Kpandu, Hohoe, Kpeve and South Dayi which occupy 4,900.4 square kilometres, representing about 20% of the Volta Region and 1.72% of Ghana’s total land size.

For purposes of commonality in indigenous cultural practices, this paper would focus on the celebration of *tequdu za* in some traditional areas in the Ho, North and South Dayi, Kpando and Hohoe Districts. The festival celebration takes place mainly in the months of August/September through December in the Ho, Peki, Awudome, Anfoega, Kpando, Hohoe and Leklebi traditional areas.

## **II. What is *Tequdu za*?**

*Tequdu za* is a yam harvest festival celebrated by northern Ewe societies which are predominantly subsistence farming communities. As a customary obligation, the first harvest of new tubers of yam is offered through the chiefs as gifts to the traditional stools, spirits of the gods and ancestors to express the people’s joy and gratitude for a bumper harvest of this food crop at the end of their farming season. *Tequdu za*, according to Dzide (2000:100):

.....is a harvest festival during which communal feasting between the gods and men take place. The celebration represents public affirmation by the people of oneness with their hierarchy of gods, ancestors and heroes. It is also a time for the rededication of the people to their chiefs. The festival creates an opportunity for solutions of family and community squabbles and misunderstandings.

The cultural significance of food being celebrated by ethnic groups in Ghana satisfies many reasons. In *tequdu za* for example, the first harvest of new tubers of yam from the farm is considered sacred. For this reason, not until the chief and his elders usher in new yams by first performing rituals to the gods, traditional stools and spirits of the ancestors by feeding them with new yams, no farmer has the right to bring fresh yams home for consumption. This is done as a public declaration by the people of oneness with their state deities and ancestors as the spiritual forces believed to have promoted the growth and bountiful harvest of yam.

A personal investigation that I carried out from (May 22-28, 2015) about the origin of yam festival in the Ho, Kpando, Peki and Hohoe traditional areas reveals that despite the lack of written records to support their claim, *tequdu za* in northern Eweland is believed to have originated from *Dotsie*, the last centre of dispersion of Ewes as a result of the tyrannical rule of Agorkoli, the king under whom they served before migrating some four centuries ago to their present areas of permanent settlement in the northern sector of Volta Region.

Like their northern neighbours, Nukunya (1997:106) traces the origin of festivals of the southern Ewes and states that “the origin of their festivals are deeply rooted in the history, tradition and culture of *Hogbe*, a name associated with *Dotsie*, their ancestral home located in central Togo. Among these festivals which are considered as music and ritual are: *Hogbetsotso* of the people of Aŋloga, *Totsogbe* of the Sokpoe traditional area in the South Tonju district and *Hogbeza*, an annual festival celebration of the people of Aveno traditional area”

What, therefore, is a ritual? A rite or a ritual can be explained as a prescribed form of carrying out a religious action or ceremony. Ritual as part of northern Ewe *teduqu za* can best be described in the words of Mbiti (1991:131) as a means of communicating something of religious significance, through word, symbol and action to the gods or powers that rule their destiny. The ritual word is powerful since it is spoken in seriousness and humility, and repeated every time that ritual is performed. In the African context, Mead (1973:87).also explains what a ritual stands for:

A ritual deals with relationships, either between a single individual and the supernatural, or among a group of individuals who share things together, and there is something about sharing that makes it ritual, including its extra degree of intensity, due to the fact that its behavioural pattern is contact between the secular and the sacred.

Amlor (2011:11) in an article; “*Oguaa Fetu afahye*: A music and ritual of the people of Cape Coast in Ghana” explains why *Fante* citizens of Cape Coast, an old coastal historical town attach importance to first feeding their gods, and ancestral stools with (*etɔ*), mashed yam before the ban on eating fresh yam is lifted. According to him, “the gods and spirits of the ancestors and the traditional stools are fed with the first fruits of their harvests from both the land and the sea, because they are perceived as gifts from the gods and the ancestors”.

Mbiti emphasises the importance of first fruits gathered at the end of harvest seasons in many African societies and explains that they are considered ‘holy or sacred’ because they open up the way for the ripening of the fields and the harvest. He further adds: “the rituals take away any dangers that could be incurred in eating the new harvest. This idea may be thought of as “cooling off” the crops, or blessing the harvest, tasting the food or taking away the bitterness. Rituals are like religious signals to the people that they may now safely eat the fruit of their labour, because by blessing the first fruits, the whole harvest is sanctified or ritually cleansed for human consumption” (1991:135-136).

*Teduqu za* has two main ritual components: private and public. While the private aspect covers rituals associated with the gods which are sacred, a public ritual, on the other hand, focuses on social and family unity that warrants the participation of every citizen. The private or sacred rituals include *nubabla* (tying of herbal leaves), *gbɔmekpɔkplɔ* (sweeping of the town) and *tetsrolɔlɔ* (gathering of yam peels). Two main public ritual performances in *teduqu za* which customarily warrant obligatory participation of every individual citizen of the land are the *tedugbe* (main festival day) and *dutakpeza* (state durbar) which crowns the festival celebration.

Preparations towards the *teduqu za* commences on the first day with the performance of *nubabla* rituals that are aimed at drawing the entire society closer to nature. Special leaves believed to have high magical potency are selected and blessed. A mixture of corn flour, palm oil, broken raw eggs, blood and feathers of a slaughtered fowl are sprinkled on the special leaves and tied together. The symbolism in tying the leaves is to disarm and weaken the power of all evil forces during the celebration. In a procession accompanied by the sound of *afaga* (state gong), the *tronua* and *trɔsiawo* (traditional priests and priestesses), are escorted by some elders, and they move throughout the community and sprinkle ritual water to drive away malevolent forces such as plague, pestilence, drought and flood. The *gbɔmekpɔkplɔ* ritual comes after the *nubabla* ritual the following day.

*Gbɔmekpɔkplɔ*, therefore, is a ritual in which all the communities are spiritually swept clean to prevent evil forces and diseases from attacking the people. According to the natives, *gbɔmekpɔkplɔ* ritual involves the use of two calabashes; one contains ordinary water and the other contains a mixture of water, palm wine and two bundles of herbs. In addition, *blikpo*; a fresh shoot of a palm branch about three feet long, has a loop at one end and two live creatures; a frog and a month old chick tied to the other end to symbolize a ‘ritual broom’ The *tronuga* shouts an onomatopoeic word signal, *haa..hoo* to which the crowd bursts out into a simultaneous response by repeating the words after him. This word is repeated three times and the crowd marches in a procession along the main road through the town after the priest who drags the symbolic broom on the ground as they move along. As the procession, continues, he dips *afla*, a ritual plant into a large calabash filled with water and sprinkles it in all directions for every household to be touched by the sacred water. A town crier goes ahead to warn people to put out all lights. If a light of any kind is seen in the direction to which the priests move, stones are thrown at it as a warning for it to be put out to avoid the wrath of the gods.

The procession through the streets of the communities continues until it stops at a heap of wood ash and charcoal dumped by the women on the main road at the outskirts of the town. The chief priest now leaves the ritual broom with the creatures tied to it, now completely dead on the heap. The death of the creatures during the ritual cleansing symbolizes the peoples' resistance to death. The *tronuga* finally prays to the gods for the entire community to be well protected from any evil attack and, as well, prevent malevolent forces from overstepping the ritual broom to enter the town. The idea of maintaining good health is always a major concern for every society in the world, and in the pursuit of this ambition, citizens of northern Eweland perform rituals that are directed to the super powers on which they depend for help, blessing, protection and removal of evil spirits that affect their homes, animals and crops. As emphasis on the interrelation of music and ritual activities of most Ghanaian societies, Aziaku (2009:230) stresses:

Prayer moves with songs and they give a captivating message to the people by indicating the strong power of the spirits which can shape their physical and spiritual needs. Africans, therefore, hold the view that the practice of music associated with humanity dates from primordial time and its use in different contextual situations either on individual or community basis has a high psychological impact which makes them believe that "music is life" and can never be done away with.

Music, therefore, depending on the context within which it is used in contemporary Africa, is what Ihekweazu (1985) describes as "a tool that the African employs to understand his/her past, and contribute to the shaping of his/her present and the future, express and document him/herself; his/her feelings, hopes, disappointments, sufferings and joy". The need for ritual performances in *tequdu za* can also be explained in terms of the people's total dependence and protection that are perceived as merits which are ascribed to the powers of those in the spiritual realm. This is the reason why the society frowns on ignorance of these values and responsibilities because the people believe that they do not only render a citizen 'foreign', but also, a misfit in the society. In addition sacrifice as part of rituals of worship in *tequdu za*, is meant to feed the deities regularly because they (deities) are part of the daily, weekly or annual worship that is inseparably linked with them. In other words, Nukunya (1997:90) states: "sacrifices are offered to pacify the gods, traditional stools and ancestral spirits as a means of removing or stopping a looming danger believed to be punishment for disobedience or some strife against the gods. Sacrifices are also gifts to the sacred in the form of thanks or ritual meal offerings to pave way for reconciling the people with one another, or with the spirits of the gods and ancestors".

The *gbomekpokpolo* ritual performance officially permits entry of 'new of fresh Yam' into the town on the third day which is the main *tequgbe* (festival celebration day). The fresh tubers of Yam are harvested and carried home by women, teenage boys and girls. A few metres away from home, the load carriers are welcomed by children amidst singing and jubilation. In the early hours of the morning, all heads and family members reunite to settle all disagreements and other family troubles. This is followed by the preparation of a ritual meal of 'plain' and 'red' mashed Yam, by the *tronuawo*. While the white or plain mashed Yam is never mixed with any type of oil, the 'red Yam' is so called because it is mashed and mixed with palm oil and are both offered to the spirits of the deities and ancestors of the land to partake of first.

Since a strong belief of the people, is that these spirit powers are closely linked with the major transitional stages of their human existence, a person, or a communal group; family, clan, village, or society, expresses gratitude or appeals directly to these spiritual forces in such situations through a medium such as a traditional priest/priestess or a spirit diviner/healer. After these super-human spirits are fed, the entire palace of the *fiaga* (paramount chief) together with the ancestral stools, are sprinkled with both white and red mashed Yam to declare the *tequdu za* open to the public. This activity in effect symbolises abundant food not only for the harvesters but also for invited friends and the entire society. The celebration is climaxed by communal family feasts in which every household prepares Yam *fufu*, (a Ghanaian delicacy prepared from pounded Yam, cassava, cocoyam or plantain) and the sound and rhythm of the pounding is heard all over the community.

To round off the festivities, a grand *dutakpeza* (state durbar) is held on a Sunday. The procession atmosphere to the durbar ground becomes charged with the poetry of songs, rhythmical phrases of instruments and dance gestures. There is a notable array of royal regalia which include *fiavuwo* (court drums), *apakawo* (palanquins), *fiazikpuiwo* (stools), *tsiami-tikplwo* (linguist staffs), *atamkayiwo* (state swords); all symbolising the status and power of the chiefs and the philosophy of the people. Other properties, some of which are cosmetics of all kinds like rich beads, jewellery and well-packed bundles of women's clothes (both local and foreign) are neatly

arranged in brass pans that are carried by teenage girls and shown to the public. At the durbar ground, libation is poured by the traditional priests and priestesses. The rites of planting and harvesting of yam and other work activities which take place on the farm are dramatized by the priests(esses), farmers' associations and cultural troupes through singing, drumming and dancing. After the dance-drama, the chief and his sub-chiefs, seated in state, receive homage from their subjects. This is followed by greetings and speeches by chiefs and important dignitaries invited to come and grace the occasion.

After activities undertaken in the state durbar are over, *tetsrolɔlɔ* ritual is performed to symbolically remove from the towns or communities, peels of new yam consumed during the festival period as a sign that marks the end of the *tequdu za*. This activity actually takes place eight days after the festival day. Though this ritual symbolically ends the celebration, the use of yam as a staple food continues until the beginning of the next sowing season that commences in early March.

A contemporary feature which has now emerged in northern Eweland is crowning the festival celebration with Christian and Moslem religious worship. Thanksgiving services are therefore held in the churches and mosques by the citizenry, to express their joy and gratitude to God/Allah, for granting them a fruitful and a successful *tequdu za*.

### **III. Music and dance in *tequdu za***

Music and dance cut across the entire socio-cultural foundation of African societies; hence, festival celebrations are regarded as religious events in which worship of the gods never lacks music making. Music as part of rituals performed during festivals is considered as a critical component of worship because Africans believe that music and rituals enhance and validate easy access or contact with all the spirit powers that are responsible for their total well-being. Similarly, Gyedu-Asamoah (2003:4) expresses why Africans to date cling to music and ritual performances to supernatural forces in their lives and work activities: "there is a deep sense that the human being is weak, impure or sinful and stands in need of transcendent power. The belief that people could enter into relationship with powerful and benevolent powers and thereby receive protection from evil forces is prevalent in African socio-religious life and popular discourse". In his investigation into the socio-cultural functions of music in indigenous worship of Ewes in the Volta Region of Ghana, Amlor (2009) comments:

Most traditional Ewe societies believe that the universe is constituted of benevolent and malevolent spirits and supernatural problems require supernatural interventions. They, therefore, seek solutions to their physical and spiritual problems through ritual performances which incorporate music making in the festival, puberty and funeral celebrations. Music and rituals are therefore perceived as the quickest means through which easy contact or communion with their spirit beings are possible.

To validate the point above, Nketia (1962), stresses: "there is the need to know more about indigenous religious life, its music, its modes of thought, beliefs and norms. It is only when we know the above that we can resist the temptation of allowing ourselves to be carried away from the knowledge of the past". Like most festival celebrations in Ghana or Africa, *tequdu za* is an action-packed event and expressed through verbal, musical, dance and body gestures geared towards proper ritual communication. Among a plethora of indigenous musical types performed in this harvest festival, a major one that by custom, involves the participation of every celebrant is *agbleha* dance-drumming. The folks put a high religious premium on this folk occupational music because of the belief that its non-performance denies the farmers and the entire society of ritual blessings which can trigger untold hardship in their health and work activities in subsequent farming seasons.

In defining and tracing the origin of this folk genre, the term *agblehawo*, which is a short form of *agbledehawo*, literally means 'farming songs', and it is derived from two Ewe words, *agbledede* (farming) and *hawo* (songs). By definition, *agblehawo* are a type of work songs that are sung by farmers as an accompaniment to their work activities in order to motivate them to boost productivity and ensure their welfare and survival; when performed at home, they serve other specific purposes. Communal performance of *agblehawo* reaches its climax on the day of the state durbar. The procession atmosphere to the durbar ground becomes charged with poetry of songs, rhythmical throbbing of drums and other instruments and varied dance movements. This is followed by prayers, animal sacrifice and pouring of libation by the *tronuawo* for the protection of the people.

The organisation and performance of *agleha* dance-drumming involve performers who are mostly adult male and female subsistence farmers as well the youth who form the bulk of the work force in these traditional societies. The stages of ritual performance in this festival largely determine the selection and use of songs. Kaemmer (1993:69), thus, writes: "music and dance are a very important part of the ritual ceremony because they frequently mark the stages of the ritual". In an interview with Francis Kyereme, a farmer and *agleha* performer on (May 15, 2015) at Kpando about why this folk music is vital in *tequdu za*, he explained:

It is our strong belief that the role(s) played by *aglehawo* that have religious themes, do not only express gratitude to the gods and ancestral spirits; but also, a means to fellowship with them. It is the people's belief that failure to carry out this cultural obligation could invoke the wrath of the gods, negate the potency of the rituals in *tequdu za* and cause hardship in the form of diseases, drought, poor harvest, and death of citizens.

After the ritual, the priests(esses), as mentioned earlier, enact rites of planting and harvesting of yam as a tribute to the super powers and deceased farmers through music, dance and drama. They sing and dance to the tunes of religious *aglehawo* which recount farmers' joy, death, burial and funeral rites of their *ameyinugbeawo* (deceased farmers). The songs praise hardworking farmers who are either alive or dead for contributing to the development of their societies in the form of providing abundant food for the people and assisting in putting up community schools, roads, or clinics. The songs also help in controlling emotions/group behaviour and maintaining a state of normalcy for those alive.

The *agleha* below with the title; *Mele wodzi zom la day' me* (I am threading over them with caution), recounts the loss of some illustrious sons and daughters who were farmers.

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Solo' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Chorus'. Both staves are in common time (indicated by 'C') and key signature of one flat (indicated by a 'B'). The vocal parts are written in soprano clef. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first section of the solo part starts with 'Mele wo dzi zom loo!', followed by 'mele wo dzi zom loo!' and 'a - me - ve - vie - wo'. The chorus part follows with 'le to me'. The second section of the solo part starts with 'Mele wodzi zom la day' - me, followed by 'l'a day me' and 'a - day' - me. The score includes measure numbers 1 and 2 above the second section of the solo part.

Example 1: An *agleha* recounting the loss of relatives who were farmers.

//:Mele wo dzi zom loo://	//I am threading over them://
Ameveviewo le to me	Important relatives are lying underground
Mele wodzi zom l'a	I am threading over them
Adaju me, l'a dayu me	With caution, with caution

Since the celebration borders so much on yam harvest and other farm products at the end of the farming season, *aglehawo* are featured in both private and communal ritual activities of the people. In the private or sacred ritual activities which include prayers, sacrifices and pouring of libation, the people move in a procession during the *gbomekpkplɔ* rituals and sprinkle every household with ritual water amidst *agleha* dance-drumming. Here the songs performed focus on petition relating to the people's care and protection by their spirit powers. In addition, the songs do not only approve cordial interrelation that strengthens social bonds between the

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celebrants, priestly groups and their guardian spirits only, but also warn or punish those whose actions are considered detrimental to the success of the celebration. These responsibilities and fear of punishment from the gods have infused into the people a sense of discipline, unity and devotion to their religious activities. It is therefore not surprising to see that to date; music and dance are deeply embedded in ritual performances in other Ghanaian festivals like the *Odwira*, a ritual of stool cleansing and purification of the land by the Akan and *Homowo*, a harvest festival celebration of the Ga of Accra, the capital of Ghana.

During the *dutakpeza*, farmers enact through music, dance and drama, difficulties they face like an outbreak of bush fire, snake bite, accidental infliction of cutlass wounds on themselves and ways they take to contain such problems or difficulties. Participation in the durbar thus, offers the celebrants a platform through music, dance and drama to exhibit what Khamalwa (2012:65) describes as “breaking down social and moral barriers, allowing people to act out often suppressed emotions, transport the celebrants to a higher plane and liberate them from the usual socially approved selective words and actions sanctioned by society” According to the people, music, dance and drama in *tedudu za* arouse feelings or emotions that stir and facilitate direct participation of the spirits of the deities in their moral, material and spiritual lives.

One can clearly realise from the actions and emotions of the celebrants during music and dance sessions what Khamalwa describes as “communication is enhanced and made more effective, as one or several people say or do different things simultaneously in a harmonious way that appeals to multiple senses”. Turner (1969) corroborates the point above and states: “the individuals blend their individual uniqueness with that of others and they draw inspiration and courage from the fact that they are not alone; solidarity and a common destiny create a sense of identity, which he calls *communitas*”. Buencosenjo (2011:1), complements the points made by Khamalwa and Turner in this way:

Music and dance are close conceptual cousins and as part of rituals, especially, the multi-sensorial types affirm participants’ experience of their material and transcendent worlds. There is the need to enter a realm of understanding them as capable of defining and negotiating the contradictions, differences and promoting human solidarity.

The hardship and other work-related problems which the people encounter during the farming season finally give way to joy and jubilation during the *tedudu za*. As a festivity that avails them a forum to relax and make merry, they sing songs (both local and foreign) in a call and response form, with themes highlighting assistance from the Supreme Being, the gods and ancestors such as:

- i. gratitude praise, love and adoration for sustaining their lives
- ii. joy of reaping bumper food harvest
- iii. protection from sickness, evil spirits, enemies and natural disasters like flood
- iv. reshaping of unhappy destinies

The text of an *agleha* below expresses the peoples’ gratitude to the Supreme Being, the gods and ancestors for granting them good health, abundant rain, soil fertility and a bumper crop harvest: *Aqaase* (Thank you Almighty God):

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is labeled "Solo" and the bottom staff is labeled "Chorus". Both staves are in common time (indicated by 'C') and G major (indicated by a 'G' with a sharp sign). The Solo staff has a treble clef and the Chorus staff has a bass clef. The music is divided into measures 1 and 2 by a vertical bar line. Measure 1 starts with a rest followed by eighth-note patterns. Measure 2 begins with a single eighth note. The lyrics are written below the notes. The Solo part sings "A-daa-se - a-daa-se, -- A-daa-se - - - nuna-mela'daa-se loo!" and "Mawuga xoa-". The Chorus part sings "A-daa-se, - a-daa-se" and "daa - se loo!". The Solo part continues with "daa - se loo!" and "A - daa - se, --- a - daa - se". The score ends with a final measure of eighth notes.

Example 2: An *agleha* expressing gratitude for a bumper food crop harvest.

//:Aqaase, aqaase://	//:Thank you, thank you://
Nunamela, aqaase	One who offers gifts, thank you.
Aqaase, aqaase	Thank you, thank you
Mawuga, aqaase	Almighty God, thank you
Aqaase, aqaase	Thank you, thank you
Gbledelawofofo, aqaase loo!	Father of farmers, thank you
Aqaase, aqaase	Thank you, thank you

Since culture is dynamic, it is worth mentioning a contemporary feature that has now characterized *tequdu za*: the use of varieties of musical genres to satisfy both ceremonial and recreational musical tastes of all celebrants. Musical types such as highlife, hip-life, reggae, rap, gospel and brass band music are now performed alongside the indigenous types like *aglehawo*, *bɔbɔbɔ*, *gbolo*, *agblɔvu*, and *adevu* as a way of fostering communal participation and social cohesion among all the participants. In this regard, the celebrants do not consider themselves as people with different social and ethnic backgrounds, status, religions and colours but rather a big family of one people. The joy in this collective participation has revived, attracted and increased youth participation in *tequdu za* from one community to the other and from all walks of life. In this vein, Idolor (2007:16) asserts:

In Africa, while the core of indigenous musical practice continues, the synthetic and entirely foreign forms also exist simultaneously to satisfy the diverse musical tastes of the pluralist society. Sometimes, entertainment based music is performed along with other non-music activities. In other situations where there is a sequence of activities, like in religious festivals, entertainment music is performed to provide the listener (individual or audience), gregariousness which ensures quite a lasting relationship.

All these activities stimulate the psyche of the participants especially the natives to settle family and community disputes in order to expunge all evils and misfortunes of a passing year. Similar to contemporary issues that form part and parcel of *Fetu afahye*, a harvest festival of the people of Cape Coast, Amlor (2011:27) cites the case of corporate bodies like Vodafone, Tigo and Airtel (mobile network service providers) who now form part of this celebration, give publicity to the celebration by sponsoring *tequdu za* musical jingles and messages in the electronic and print media and thus whip up curiosity, interest and desire of a whole lot of visitors from all over the world to be part of the celebration as participant observers. These bodies at times collaborate with media houses like the radio and television stations in the country and organise state dances to crown “Miss Tequdu za”, a beauty contest for young and talented ladies from the area. A remarkable aspect of this event includes the performance of indigenous and contemporary African music. The contestants are not only tested on their depth of knowledge about indigenous musical types that abound in Ghana or Africa but are also asked to play the musical instruments and perform some of the dances as well. These corporate groups also now channel their energy and music into peaceful self-help projects among which are; construction of community infrastructure such as schools, health posts and roads at no cost. The festival organizers also invite traditional and corporate bodies to come and educate the youth on topical issues; puberty rites and family planning in order to prevent teenage pregnancy and also avoid contracting HIV/AIDS disease which to date, has no known medical cure.

An in-depth study of northern Ewe songs shows that they are not absolutely considered on grounds of elements like melody, polyphony, intervals and rhythm that constitute it. Song texts and poetry, referred to as *hakpanyawo*, play crucial roles. The song texts are therefore a combination of poetry and musical expression with coded messages that are embedded in vital historical facts and socio-cultural teachings which help the listener to know and understand the aesthetic values, history, philosophy and cultural life of a people. Merriam (1964), commenting on song texts and human behaviour, states: “one of the most obvious sources of

understanding human behaviour in connection with music is the song text. The text of course, is language behaviour rather than music sound, but they are integral parts of music, and there is clear-cut evidence that language used in connection with music differs from that of ordinary discourse". Similarly, Nketia (1974:189) asserts:

The treatment of a song as a form of speech utterances arises not only from the stylistic considerations or from the consciousness of the analogous features of speech and music; it is also an avenue of verbal communication, a medium for creative verbal expression which can reflect both personal and social experiences".

The celebrants also believe that the songs sung during the *tequduza* help them to understand their past, shape the present and face farming activities in the future with confidence. The celebration also offers them the opportunity to express through songs and dance gestures, their feelings, hopes, disappointments, sufferings and joy encountered during farming to the public. As stated by Mbiti (1991:143), "religious and social values are repeated and renewed through communal participation in activities like music, dance, drama and oral communication". Furthermore, it is a strong northern Ewe indigenous belief that song texts, to a large extent help in achieving social control and cohesion, addressing topical issues, praising hard work, ridiculing lazy farmers, showing gratitude and fostering a close bond between the people and the Supreme Being, the gods and ancestral spirits. The song texts also highlight the pride and joy of citizens who work hard and gain good economic status, and urge others to follow suit.

In contrast to songs that emphasise hard work in the society, an alternative text of an *agleha* cited below with the title; **D'agle naqu loo!** (Cultivate a food crop farm to enable you eat!), allegorically ridicules lazy youngsters who hardly know the difference between food crops like yam and cassava because they shun farming and do not feed their families but rather, they loiter from one drinking bar to the other in the community boozing.

//: <i>Dagble naqu loo!</i> //	//:Cultivate a food crop farm to enable you eat!://
<i>Miatɔa kankoawoe!</i>	Fellow young folks!
<i>Dagble, nanyi dokuiwo,</i>	Cultivate a food crop farm to sustain your life
<i>Nɔvi! dagble, naqu loo!</i>	Folks! Cultivate a food crop farm to enable you to eat!

It is interesting to note that almost all the performing groups in this festival celebration sing songs that centre on love, unity and patriotism. Songs under this category cut across different types of love, ranging from social love, communal love, filial love, parental love to erotic love. Numerous as the aspects of love may be, the basic underlying factor that runs through these songs is the concern for the well-being of the object of one's love which can be one's blood brother or sister, spouse, friend, society, country and humanity on the whole. One can clearly observe that places, where songs of love abound in Ewe communal activities, peace, unity and solidarity, wields the citizens as one people with a common destiny. The themes also strengthen ties and eventually create peaceful co-existence of the people.

*Yequdu* (dance performance) as a non-verbal communication satisfies both ritual and non-ritual purposes in African socio-cultural activities. *Yequdu* in the African context is readily seen as a running commentary on the social life of the people. Radcliffe Brown (1952) describes dance as "the state of elation in which the feeling of increased self-importance in the dancer engenders in him a feeling of geniality and goodwill towards his companions".

Dance movements which are largely dictated by instrumental rhythms of various dances in *tequduza*, serve a complex diversity of social purposes: emotional satisfaction which impacts deeply on the citizens, enhancement of communication, body movements and the use of gestures. The dance forms may be linear, circular, serpentine, or columns of two or more rows and involve the use of the hips, intricate and gliding footsteps that move and alternate from side to side with the arms swinging in the direction of the alternating footsteps. There is also fast rotation, ripples of the body, contraction and release, as well as variations in dynamics levels and use of space. Three dance forms are identifiable in *tequdu za*: solo dance in which an individual executes basic styles of dance alone and the form in which two, three or four individuals take turns in

the dance arena. There is also communal dance which is executed in unorganised order and thus, allowing room for individual styles and dance movements. Akuna (2008:1) examines the role(s) of Ghanaian dances and states:

.....dance as a psychological form of behaviour is speculated to help in conditioning the emotional state of individual members (of given societies), by helping to build their personal self-worth, the cathartic and therapeutic function of dance is linked to this behaviour, since certain experience of dance performance can help to purge negative feelings and emotion of both performers and spectators

One can clearly notice in this contemporary era that there are changing trends in many African societies which are not the making of the people but rather, the product of external socio-cultural pressures that have emerged and impacted on the people through Western and Arab education, religion, technology and modernity. While this paper does not aim at condemning foreign cultural influences, it rather suggests that there should be the need for adoption of only aspects that can enhance and project African cultural identity or values. In this direction, Amlor (2011:28) cautions:

Traditional/opinion leaders, clans and family heads, government and personnel in the print/electronic media, composers/arrangers, researchers and performers should be mindful of African values and consequently protect them. If the aim of the mass media (both audio and video) for example, is to inform, educate and entertain, the bulk of items that constitute their programmes should reflect on the environment in which the listeners and viewers live. This would enable them to know the essence, understand and take pride in their cultural heritage.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The *tedudu za* of northern Ewes, is an annual yam harvest festival celebration which takes place mainly in the months of August/September through December in the Ho, Peki, Awudome, Anfoega, Kpando, Hohoe and Leklebi traditional areas that can be located in the Ho, North and South Dayi, Kpando and Hohoe Districts of the Volta Region of Ghana. It is a period when the first harvest of new tubers of yam are prepared as a ritual meal by chiefs and their elders to feed the gods, traditional stools and spirits of their ancestors. Not until this rite is performed, no farmer has the right to bring fresh yams home for consumption. This ritual is a public affirmation by the people of oneness with the hierarchy of their gods and ancestors who are believed to be the spiritual forces behind the growth and bountiful harvest of yam. The celebration is also seen as an opportunity that provides solutions to their intrinsic psychological and emotional problems raise hopes, clears doubts about mysteries that centre on the cosmology, the purpose of existence, fortunes/misfortunes, death and life after death. Apart from the indigenous music genres that are featured, contemporary musical types such as highlife, reggae, gospel songs and brass band music are also performed during *tedudu za* to satisfy the musical tastes of all the participants and thereby foster unity and co-existence among them. Idolor (2007:14) in the light of the above, comments: "in examining social factors that subject Africans to music making; desire for cultural identity, didactic function, entertainment, integrative and religious essence are given emphasis". Similarly, Nketia (1966:20) concludes:

A village that has no organized music or neglects community singing, drumming and dancing are said to be dead. Music making is, therefore, an index of a living community and a measure of the degree of social cohesion among its respective units.

The government and policy makers in the educational sector in Ghana, as well as other African countries, should, therefore, be conscious of the fact that majority of students turned out from the basic schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities would serve as future leaders in African societies; hence, the study of African indigenous knowledge including the performing arts as a basis for a Ghanaian or African-oriented educational curriculum is very critical.

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